# AN INVESTIGATION ON THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG BURNOUT LEVELS OF PRESCHOOL TEACHER TRAINEES, CERTAIN VARIABLES AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study was carried out so as to investigate the burnout levels of preschool teacher trainees in terms of some variables such as their undergraduate program, grades, high school types they graduated, perceived parental attitude, family type, voluntarily enrolling in the department or not, and their perceived social support. The study group of the present study was composed of 142 teacher trainees attending the Department of Preschool Teacher Education, College of Education and the Department of Preschool Teacher Education and the Department of Child Development and Education, College of Vocational Education at Gazi University during 2010-2011 academic year. Perceived Social Support Scale and Burnout Measure Short Version were used as data collection tools. The results of the study showed that the burnout levels of preschool teacher trainees were significantly different in terms of some variables; the undergraduate program they enrolled in, high school types they graduated, family types and perceived parental attitude ($p<0.05$). According to the dimensions voluntarily enrolling in the department or not and their grades, the results of Burnout Inventory showed no significant difference. A negative correlation was determined between the burnout levels of teacher trainees and their perceived social support ($p<0.01$). Some suggestions were offered considering the results of the study.

**Key words:** Burn out, preschool, teacher trainees, Perceived Social Support

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The situation which stems from physical and psychological problems depending on the outcome of the troubles people facing in daily life and is called burnout syndrome shows itself as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment or the decrease in academic performance (Maslach, 2003; Gündüz, 2005; Maslach & Leiter, 2007; Kounenou et al., 2010).

Dworkin (2007) defines burnout as inability to cope with a series of stressors in life. Gold and Roth (1993) relate burnout with working conditions and interpret it as discrepancy between input and output in working environment and they mention that individual and social factors have strong effects on this phenomena. In addition to these, factors such as workload, social support, sense of self and creative thinking are seen as precursors of burnout syndrome (Loonstra et al., 2009).

In the related literature, burnout is categorized into three groups as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is feeling oneself emotionally worn out and tired. An individual experiencing emotional exhaustion, which is directly caused by stress, has problems related to work (e.g. arriving at work late) and somatic disorders. Accepted as the basic symptom of burnout, emotional exhaustion may cause quitting the job. Depersonalization, as a result of burnout, is portraying insensitive and devil-may-care attitude, and being sarcastic to people around him. Low personal accomplishment is considered as inadequacy in an individual's abilities, productivity and capacity (Bakker, 2000; Friedman,2003; Maslach ve Leiter, 2007; Tümkaya, Çam ve Çavuşoğlu, 2008; Sağlam Arı & Çına Bal, 2008; Schwarzer, 2008; Vercambre, 2009; Montero-Marin et al., 2009; Grbovic et al., 2011).

Burnout is widely prevalent among career clusters in which workers densely deal with public relations, and which have stressful and unfavorable working conditions with a lot of workloads (Çavuşoğlu, 2009; Deniz Kan, 2008). Teaching is ranked as one of the most stressful jobs and burnout syndrome can be frequently encountered among teachers. Many issues like following innovations in the field and applying these innovations in their teaching, dealing with students' various problems, trying to work in concert with their colleagues and administrative staff, trying to keep the balance between family and teacher increase the stress levels of teachers (Chan, 2003; Clarce & Holmes, 2005; Lambert & McCarty, 2006; Kayabaşı, 2008; Coulter & Abney, 2009). Beside these negative working conditions, personal characteristics, like introversion, are also the cuases of burnout. Burnout is not a situation that immediately occurs but a result of the effects of aforementioned environmental and personal factors in time (Pyhältö et al., 2011). Burnout decreases teachers' desire and enthusiasm, and in parallel with the years of teaching experience burnout level increases (Saha & Dworkin, 2009; Cemaloğlu & Şahin Erdemoğlu, 2007). The negative consequences of burnout not only affect the individuals themselves but also may cause negative outcomes in the institution (Dierendonck et al., 2001).

Social support resources have a very important place in preventing individuals from having burnout syndrome by improving their abilities to cope with the problems and stress in their lives. Individual benefiting from social support resources is likely to be affected less by burnout (Kim-Van,1991; Gold & Roth, 1993; Huberman & Vanderbergh, 1999; Salamı, 2009; Yellice Yüksel et al., 2011). While academic achievement levels of students

who receive positive social support from families and friends increase, their problem solving skills also improve more than those who do not receive social support. Beside being an important factor in protecting mental health, social support helps students see themselves as more valuable and also help them increase their self-confidence (Kahriman & Yeşilçiçek, 2007). Akın and Ceyhan (2005), state that perceived social support plays an important role in the decrease of stress, depression and anxiety levels of individuals and they also state that it increases individuals' self-esteem and adjustment levels. When social support is low, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are becomes high (Vercambre, 2009). When the amount of social support teachers receive increase, their professional competences also increase. Because of the positive effects on teachers' psychology, social support also plays a great role in getting teachers to love and continue their jobs successfully (Pomaki, 2010).

Social support is defined as necessary and practical support, like guidance, value and the situations where individual is in need, provided by family, friends and social environment (Tam et al, 2011). The functionality of social support is evaluated by the positive effect it has on individuals. Individuals benefit from social support according to what extent they are supported when they face with problems, value they get and being liked in their social relations. School, family and close friends become prominent among the social support resources. Human, as a social being, can be socially and psychologically healthier only when he uses social support resources effectively (Arıcıoğlu & Akdur, 2009). The effect of social support is related to how much an individual perceives the existence of a social environment that support him, and the extent and strength of the provided social support (Bokhorst et al., 2009). When there is a lack in social support, the probability of appearance of psychological problems like depression and anxiety increases (Veenstra, 2010). Burnout syndrome emerges when the stress factors increases and continues in one's life (Haoukes et al., 2001; Drewett, 2005).

University life is a time when stress factors increase; leaving home and family, orientation to new school and rearranging friendship relations can be regarded among these stress factors which are important for individual's social adaptation,. A student's adaptation to new situations happens by getting positive support from resources like friends, family and school. Students are confronted with a lot of problems in their new lives and they need social support to overcome these problems. As an element providing a physically and psychologically healthy transition process, needed social support becomes an important element in students' lives (Arıcıoğlu ve Akdur, 2009: 15).

In the literature review, it is seen that studies related to burnout in education were carried out more on teachers and administrators (Friedman, 2000; Kramer-Hayon et al., 2001; Brouwers & Tomic, 2001; Hakanen et al., 2006). The importance of beginning to a profession healthily can be better understood when the fact that burnout emerges after a stressful period of time into consideration. During university years, students have to deal with many problems, adapt to different situations and in addition to these, they have to be academically successful. Under these aforementioned problems, benefiting from social support resources allowing them to start their professions both in a physically and psychologically healthy manner is very important for students. For this reason, this study was carried out in order to investigate the burnout levels of preschool teacher trainees attending the Department of Preschool Teacher Education and the Department of Child Development and Education in terms of some variables.

## 2. METHOD

Relational screening model was applied in this study to investigate burnout levels of preschool teacher trainees in terms of some variables.

In the present study, it was examined that whether the burnout levels of preschool teacher trainees change according to some variables; their undergraduate program, grades, high school types they graduated, perceived parental attitude, family type, voluntarily enrolling in the department or not, and their perceived social support.

### 2.1. Participants

The study group for this research consisted of 142 teacher trainees from the Department of Preschool Teacher Education, College of Education and the Department of Preschool Teacher Education and the Department of Child Development and Education, College of Vocational Education, Gazi University. The study was carried out in 2010-2011 academic year. Of the 142 students, 17 (12%) students were graduates of regular high school, 64 (45.1%) students were graduates of child development department of vocational high schools for girls, 61 (43%) students were graduates of Anatolian teacher high school and 12 (7.7%) were freshmen, 51 (35.9%) were sophomore, 53 (37.3%) were junior and 26 (18.3%) senior students. Out of 142 students, 125 (88%) students were females and the remaining 17 (%12) were males. 76 (53.5%) were enrolled in the undergraduate program of preschool teacher education and the remaining 66 (46.5%) were enrolled in the undergraduate program of child development and education.

### 2.2. Data collection tools

For the purpose of the present study, Personal Information Form, Perceived Social Support Scale and the Burnout Measure Short Version were used as data collection tools.

#### 2.2.1. Personal information form

Personal information form was prepared by the researcher in order to get the necessary information about some of the variables such as the participants' undergraduate program, grades, high school types they graduated, perceived parental attitude, family type and voluntarily enrolling in the department or not.

**2.2.2. The burnout measure short version**

The Burnout Measure Short Version was developed by Pines (2005) and it was adapted into Turkish by Tümkaya et al. (2009). The Burnout Measure Short Version is a likert-type scale composed of 10 items which measures physical, mental and emotional burnout levels all together in one dimension. Tümkaya et al. (2009), who adapted the scale into Turkish, used both explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses in order to evaluate the factor structure of the scale. As a result of the analyses, it was seen that the scale was a single- factor scale. Cronbach Alpha and test-retest were applied for the reliability of the adapted scale. Internal consistency reliability coefficient was.91. Test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated as.70 (Tümkaya et al., 2009, p. 396).

**2.2.3. Perceived social support scale**

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support was developed by Zimet et al. (1988) and Eker et al. (2001) adapted it into Turkish. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support is composed of 12 items and it subjectively assesses the perceptions about social support received from *Family, Friends and Significant Other*. Internal consistency reliability coefficient was found to be.89 (Eker et al., 2001, p. 18)

**2.2.4. Data analysis**

Independent Sample T-test was performed so as to examine the burnout levels of teacher trainees according to their undergraduate program; one-way variance analysis was performed so as to examine the results according to their high school types; Kruskal Wallis H Test was performed to examine according to their grades; Mann-Whitney U Test was performed to examine according to their perceived parental attitudes and family types, and whether they voluntarily enrolled the program or not; Pearson Correlation Test was used to determine their perceived social supports.

## 3. FINDINGS

In this section, the findings of the study shown in tables will be given as a summary because of the page limits. The burnout levels of teacher trainees were examined in terms of some certain variables; their undergradduate program, grades, high school types they graduated, perceived parental attitude, family type, voluntarily enrolling in the department or not, and their perceived social support.

### 3.1. Burnout levels / Teacher trainees' undergraduate program

**Table 1.** Independent Samples T-Test Results Showing Their Burnout Levels According To Their Undergraduate Programs

| Undergraduate Program | N | $\bar{X}$ | s | T | sd | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preschool teacher training | 76 | 34,68 | 10,43 | 4,874 | 140 | .000* |
| Child development and education | 66 | 26,86 | 8,37 | 4,950 | | |

**p< 0.05*

Table 1 shows that the average score on the Burnout Scale of teacher trainees enrolled in Preschool Teacher Training Department was $\bar{X}$=34.68, and higher than the average score of teacher trainees enrolled in Child Development and Education department ( $\bar{X}$=26,86). This difference was found to be significant (p<0.05).

### 3.2. Burnout levels / Teacher trainees' high school types

**Table 2.** One-Way Variance Analysis Of Teacher Trainees' Burnout Levels According To Their High School Types

| The Source of the Variance | Sum of Squares | Sd | Averages of Squares | F | p | Source of Differences Scheffe Test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intergroup | 800,106 | 2 | 400,053 | 3,946 | .022* | Vocational Schools for Girls - Anatolian Teacher High School |
| Intragroup | 14090,548 | 139 | 101,371 | | | |
| Total | 14890,655 | 141 | | | | |

**p<0.05*

When table 2 is examined, which gives the burnout levels of teacher trainees according to the high school types they graduated from, it is clearly seen that there was a significant difference between the scores they got from the Burnout Inventory (F=3.946, p<0.05). According to Scheffe Test, which was performed in order to determine the source of differences, the difference was between Vocational Schools for Girls ( $\bar{X}$=28,56) and Anatolian Teacher High School ( $\bar{X}$=33,62), and it was in favor of the trainees who graduated from Vocational Schools for Girls.

### 3.3. Burnout levels / Teacher trainees' grades

According to the results obtained from Kruskal Wallis H Test, which was performed in order to examine burnout levels of teacher trainees according to their grades, there were no significant differences among their scores (p|>0.05). Beside this, when their mean ranks were examined, it was seen that freshmen teacher trainees got the lowest burnout average scores (mean rank =39.91) and senior teacher trainees got the highest burnout average scores (76.13).

### 3.4. Burnout levels / Whether teacher trainees voluntarily enrolled in the program or not

Mann-Whitney U Test was performed in order to examine teacher trainees' burnout levels according to whether they voluntarily enrolled the department or not. Although no significant difference was found at the end of the analysis, it was determined that teacher trainees who involuntarily enrolled in the program had higher burnout scores (mean rank=73.97) than the burnout scores of those who voluntarily enrolled in the program (mean rank=67.36).

### 3.5. Burnout levels /Perceived parental attitude

**Table 3.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results Of Teacher Trainees' Burnout Levels According To Perceived Parental Attitude

| | Parental Attitude | N | Mean Rank | Total Rank | U | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BURNOUT INVENTORY | Democratic attitude | 89 | 55,49 | 4939,00 | | |
| | Protective attitude | 42 | 88,26 | 3707,00 | .934,000 | |
| | Total | 131 | | | | .000* |

**p<0.05*

According to the table 3, a significant difference between teacher trainees' Burnout Inventory scores in terms of their perceived parental attitude was determined (p<0.05). Thus, when the average scores are examined, it is possible to say that burnout level of preschool teacher trainees who perceived their parents as having protective attitude was higher (mean rank=88.26) than those who perceived their parents' attitude as democratic (mean rank=55.49).

### 3.6. Burnout Level/Family type

In order to determine the burnout level of teacher trainees according to their family types, Mann-Whitney U test was applied. According to the results gained through this analysis, a significant difference in favor of teacher trainees who had immediate family type was found (p<0.05). According to this significance level, it was determined that teacher trainees who had extended family (mean rank=92.25) were more burned-out than the ones who had immediate family types (mean rank=68.87) (p<0.05).

### 3.7. Burnout level/Perceived social support

**Table 4.** Pearson Correlation Test Results For The Relation Between Teacher Trainees' Burnout Levels And Their Perceived Social Support

| | | Burnout | Perceived Social Support |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Burnout** | r | 1 | -.301(*) |
| | p | . | .000 |
| | N | 142 | 142 |
| **Perceived social support** | r | -.301(*) | 1 |
| | p | .000 | . |
| | N | 142 | 142 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Based on table 4, results indicate that there is a significant negative correlation between teacher trainees' burnout levels and their perceived social support (r=.301, p<0.01). In other words, when teacher trainees perceived social support level increases, their burnout level decreases and when their perceived social support decreases, their burnout level increases.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This present study, which was carried out in order to investigate the relation among preschool teacher trainees' burnout levels, some certain variables and their perceived social supports, made us think that teacher trainees might experience burnout at different levels according to their graduate programs since the study results showed that teacher trainees attending Child Development and Education Department had less burnout levels than

those who are attending Preschool teaching Department. Ören and Türkoğlu (2006), in their study on the burnout levels of senior students from different departments, found out that senior students attending Preschool Teaching Department had less burnout levels than seniors attending the Department of Electronic and Computer Teaching. Preschool teacher trainees' having high level of burnout may be because there were more students who graduated from regular high schools and they might have the achievement anxiety. Since many of the teacher trainees attending Child Development and Education Department were graduates of vocational schools for girls, they were already familiar with the contents of the subjects and for this reason they might not have achievement anxiety.

According to the results analysis obtained from this present study, preschool teacher trainees, who are the graduates of Anatolian Teacher High School, had higher levels of burnout ($p<.0.05$). Gündüz (2005) determined that teachers who are graduates of Faculty of Education had more burnout levels than those who are graduates of teachers' high schools and teacher training institute. In a study carried out on teacher trainees from regular classroom teaching department, Çavuşoğlu (2009) determined that there were no significant differences between students' burnout levels and high school types they graduated. Beside this, in that study it was expressed that the burnout inventory scores of teacher trainees' graduated from teachers' high school were higher than graduates of other high schools. This result is supported by the results of this current study. Students graduate of Anatolian Teacher High School generally have high expectations for their goals during both their high school and university education and because of having an intensive study program in order to meet these expectations, they feel themselves under pressure before they start their university lives. This makes us believe that the psychological effects of this situation may continue during their university lives. Besides, because of not achieving high enough scores on the university entrance exam to attain their goal they may be experiencing high stress and this stress may cause teacher trainees indifference to their departments and this may result in burnout syndrome.

Although there were no significant differences among the grades, it was determined that senior students had the highest burnout levels. This finding is also parallel to the findings of a previous study (Güdük et al., 2005), which explored the burnout levels of medical students. In the present study, it was accentuated that this high burnout levels experienced by students before they start the profession may become much more serious in their working conditions. The reasons why senior students had the highest burnout levels might be practical application courses and KPSS exam, which every candidate teacher should take to be hired as a teacher at state schools.

Even though there was no significant difference according to the dimension of enrolling the department voluntarily or involuntarily, the burnout levels of preservice teachers who enrolled the program involuntarily were higher. This finding is in consistent with other studies on teachers conducted in Turkey by Yıldız Kırılmaz et al. (2003), Cemaloğlu and Şahin Erdemoğlu (2007), Deniz Kan (2008), Akman et al. (2010); they found out that teachers who do their job voluntarily showed less burnout than those who do their job involuntarily. On the basis of the results, it is possible to say that interest and commitment to profession has a positive effect on an individual's psychology.

The results of the current study showed that teacher trainees who have extended family had more burnout levels than those who have immediate family ($p<0.05$). The probability to encounter negative characteristics, like instability and inconsistency in parents' and other family members' behaviors, is higher in an extended family. It is possible for children to experience more stress according to their parents' attitudes. Results obtained from the present study also confirmed that teacher trainees who perceived their parents as democratic had less burnout levels than trainees who perceived their parents as protective ($p<0.05$). Contrary to this finding, Ören and Türkoğlu (2006) determined that there were no correlations between perceived parents' attitude and teacher trainees' burnout levels. However, studies carried out by Ulasoy et al. (2005) and Erözkan (2009) showed that parents' attitudes might affect children's psychology in a negative way. For an individual, decreased mental health might increase the risk of having emotional burnout (Maslach ve Leiter, 2007).

The results illustrated that there was a negative significant difference between perceived social support and the burnout levels of teacher trainees ($p<0.01$). This present result is consistent with those of previous studies such as the one done by Gündüz (2005). He found out that teachers receiving social support experienced lower levels of burnout and their personal accomplishment were higher than the ones who did not receive social support. Dierendonck et al. (1997) in their study investigating the effect of social support program on burnout determined a decrease in burnout level of the subjects in experimental group in comparison with the control group. Yellice Yüksel et al. (2001) found out that teachers receiving social support from their administrators and colleagues experienced lower levels of burnout when compared to teachers not receiving social support. Pozo-munoz et al. (2008) concluded that there was a significant correlation between teachers' perceived social support and their burnout levels, social support had an important effect on increasing teachers' coping skills and also they found out that social support forms a buffer area against negative factors affecting teachers' health, happiness and social life. In their research examining the relation between social support and life satisfaction levels of students, Danielsen et al. (2009) ascertained that there was a strong positive relation between students' life satisfaction levels and social support they received from their families and schools. In the same study, the results showed that social support received from peers and teachers was more effective on their academic achievement than social support they received from their families. Brouvers et al. (1999) determined that teachers' perceived social support had a great effect on their self-efficacy and burnout levels. Tam et al. (2011) found out that there was a positive relation between students' self-confidence and perceived social support. Bemardon et al. (2001) investigated the relation between students' perceived social support and their loneliness levels and they concluded that when perceived social support increased, the level of loneliness decreased. Loneliness is defined as an individual's isolating oneself from the world because of disappointing and unpleasant experiences in his/her social interactions. The feeling of loneliness may cause psychological problems. Beside this, there is a negative correlation between life satisfaction and loneliness. When the feeling of loneliness increases the level of life satisfaction decreases.

Loneliness and life satisfaction also correlate with burnout. When we assess the results of all these aforementioned studies as a whole, it is possible to say that strongly functioning social support resources diminish the possibility of experiencing burnout levels of students by psychologically relieving them.

## 5. SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions can be offered in the light of the results obtained from the present study;

- Especially, teacher trainees that are graduates of Anatolian High Schools experience burnout more. It can be said that it is inevitable that psychological pressure students have during the process of attending to these schools and during their education cause burnout in their university education. In this context, it is suggested that both families and educators should help students pass this process healthily by taking their psychological states into consideration as well as their academic achievements.
- Guidance and counseling services of schools and media organs should carry out more effective works or studies on the types of psychological dangers students can face and how these dangers may affect their future lives. Guidance and counseling services in schools should become services that provide social support to students and families instead of being regarded as a place where students with problematic behaviors are disciplined.
- Counselors dealing with the students who are preparing for university entrance exams should give special and detailed information about the preschool teaching department to those students who will select this department, especially to the ones from Anatolian High Schools, Teacher High Schools and etc.
- Benefitting from social support resources is related to the use of social skills an individual has; in this scope, it is important to offer courses to improve social skills at university level. Individuals with good social skills will be able to use social support resources effectively and their feelings about life will be more positive and their abilities to cope with stress and problem solving skills will be improved.
- Many of the factors like parents' attitudes and family types have great influence on children's psychological and mental health. For this reason, especially in extended families, other members of the family should exhibit consistent behaviors with parents in order them to show positive attitudes. Within this scope, it can be suggested to have other members of extended families participate family education programs held through family education centers, guidance and counseling services at schools and community colleges.
- Improving professional social support services at school and allowing teacher trainees to effectively use social support resources such as social events, guidance and counseling services etc. are of great importance. The effective use of social support resources at school will lead teacher trainees up to a good preparation for their careers and motivation by protecting their mental health.

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